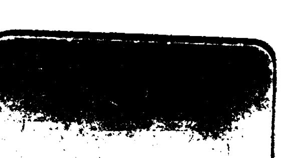


Horatio Nelson

POEMS

FROM THE SPANISH

OF

FRA LUIS PONCE DE LEON

TRANSLATED

By HENRY PHILLIPS Jr

Fra Luis de Leon es quel que digo,
A quien yo reverencio, adoro y sigo.
—*Cervantes*

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No. ....

PREFACE.

LUIS PONCE DE LEON was born of a noble family at Granada, according to the weight of authority, in the year 1528. At the age of sixteen he entered into the order of St. Augustine, where his religious fervour soon gave direction to his muse. Five years' solitary confinement in a dark dungeon was the reward which one of his early productions, a translation of the Song of Solomon, received from the Holy Inquisition. Shown at length to be innocent of any heretical intention of disseminating the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue, he was set free and reinstated in all his ecclesiastical dignities, which he enjoyed in peace until his death, which took place in 1591.

The pious placidity of the Spanish mind is especially predominant in his writings, in which he ever followed and strove after the models of classical antiquity. Bigotry held no place in his composition; his harmony of ideas and expressions was sullied by no extravagant hyperbole. "But no human sympathies are to be found in his song; the celestial arcana were his sole attractions, and their contemplation afforded him the relief experienced by

mundane poets in the delights of an imaginary Arcadia. His whole life was one long pious meditation uninfluenced by the external world."

His main faults grow out of his severely critical taste leading him sometimes into rather prosaic thoughts and anticlimaxes, *llevando este buena dote hasta el estremo de convertirla alguna vez en viciosa, cayendo en bajeza y prosaismo.* But one of his great characteristics is the expression of the most lofty and sublime ideas with the fewest and simplest words, and it has been truly written of him that "for classic purity of style and moral dignity, he has never been surpassed in Spanish literature."

HENRY PHILLIPS, JR.

PHILADELPHIA:
320 South Eleventh Street.

Poems from the Spanish of De Leon.

THE ASCENSION.

And thou hast left, oh pastor saint,
Thy flock to wander in this vale obscure,
In solitude and plaint,
Whilst thou, most high and pure,
Dost cleave the air, immortal and secure.

And those who erst were happiest
Are full of sorrow, sadness, weeping sore;
Nurtured upon thy breast
Thy loss we now deplore—
Where shall they turn for comfort, where adore?

What object now shall glad those eyes
That basked in sunshine of thy beauteous face?
What should they not despise
Who heard thy voice's grace?
All other sounds must leave an evil trace.

Since now thou'rt hidden from our view,
What hand shall rule the billowing ocean's might?
Who'll curb its rage anew
When storm-winds take their flight?
What compass guide the bark through starless night?

Ah, envious clouds that hence convey
Our earthly joy, of but a moment's span!
Whence speed they with such prey?
How rich they sail away,—
And what a poor, blind erring thing is man!

NOCHE SERENA.

When to the heavenly dome my thoughts take flight,
With shimmering stars bedecked, ablaze with light,
Then sink my eyes down to the ground,
In slumber wrapped, oblivion bound,
Enveloped in the gloom of darkest night;

With love and pain assailed, with anxious care,
A thousand troubles in my breast appear,
My eyes turn to a flowing rill,
Sore sorrow's tearful floods distill,
While saddened, mournful words my woes declare.

Oh, dwelling fit for angels! sacred fane!
The hallowed shrine where youth and beauty reign!
Why in this dungeon, plunged in night,
The soul that's born for Heaven's delight
Should cruel Fate withhold from its domain?

What madness ever swayed the human brain
From Truth and Purity to speed amain,
With mind forgetful of the hand
Divine, to roam in error grand,
Along a path beset by phantoms vain?

Bound in fell chains, a captive in his bloom
To futile dreams, forgetful of his doom,
    The heavens with rapid, noiseless tread
    Speed in their courses overhead,
As life runs racing fleet to Death's dread gloom.

Arouse, I say! ye mortals ope' your eyes,
Behold with steadfast gaze your fearful loss!
    Can the immortal soul, create
    For deeds of Honor's high Estate,
On shadows banquet and deceptions prize?

Awake! and raise on high your fixed regard
To where eternal fires the welkin guard!
    Tear down the bars that dim your view,
    Despise Earth's joys of flattering hue,
In hope and fear strive for just Heaven's reward.

What is it but a small, quick-rolling dot
This base, ignoble earth, when once we see
    The spheres celestial wherein Fate
    Hath mirrored forth a future state
Of all that was, or is, or e'er shall be?

Behold the skies, the harmonies that sway
Those flaming orbs with clear, eternal ray,
    Whose movements true are led by law,
    Whose pace unerring hath no flaw,
Whose steps ordained in due proportion stray.

The cresset of the eve, the moon's mild gleams,
Whirls like a silvery shield, while from her streams
The glory whence deep learning flows,
Beside her track bright Venus glows,
In sparkling radiance, soft, pellucid beams.

Another path is traversed by red Mars,
The god of anger, deadly strife and wars;
And far-off Jupiter benign,
From whom ten thousand blessings shine,
With torch of love sheds peace among the stars.

Most distant of them all, and in their maze,
Rolls Saturn, father of the golden days;
Around him blaze a happy band,
A dazzling chorus on each hand,
Who share his treasure and divide his rays.

Lives there a man, who, when he views this sight,
Doth not despise this petty, earthly, plight?
Who doth not sigh in grievous pain,
And strive to rend the fleshly chain
That fetters him, an exile from pure light?

In those far realms of Hope content is found,
In gentle peace, tranquillities profound;
Enshrined on rich and lofty throne
Reigns kindly Love's own sacred zone,
Where purities and holiness abound.

And all that wondrous beauty without end,
Unblemished shines with incandescent light,
With ray unsullied, softly bright,
Upon whose day there falls no night,
Where Spring's eternal myriad odors blend.

Ye fields of Truth! ye tender sweetest bliss!
Ye meadows fresh, with guileless love well-stored!
Ye mines of richest ore!
Ye hearts of joy's full store!
Ye vales replete with Pleasure's purest hoard!

[This poem is considered De Leon's masterpiece, but the ending shows a sad falling off from the beauty of the beginning.]

CUÁNDO SERÁ.

Oh, when shall I, from prison free,
To the Empyrean wing my longing flight,
Cleaving the skies in liberty,
Leaving this earth's entombing plight,
Behold, unharmed, the Truth's most sacred light?

There shall I tarry, freed from care,
In Heaven's pure splendor, glorious demesne;
All knowledge 'fore my soul laid bare
That e'er can be, or e'er has been,
Its most recondite lore will clear be seen.

Before my eyes the laws displayed
How once the Sov'reign Hand the stars did greet,
The world's foundations firmly laid
By plumb and level, true, complete,
To ponderous elements gave stable seat.

Those lofty columns shall I see
That high-exalted bear our planet's weight,
The fetters know 'gainst which the sea
Rolls billows curbed by kindly fate,
By Providence that chains its wild estate;

And why this globe doth tremble, quake,
And why the shrilly North-Winds rage and roar,
The hollow waves in surges break
That lash the skies, to heaven soar,
And why the ebb and flood-tides ne'er give o'er.

Whence babbling brooks their being take,
Where flowing fountains, whence the streams arose,
The rills that ripple to the lake,
Whence come the frosts, the winter snows,
What brings the summer-heat when Sirius glows;

The drizzling rains within the sky,
Who holds their misty burden in its place,
Who wields the thunderbolt on high,
Who speeds the lurid levin's pace,
And holds the day and night in his embrace.

Hast thou not marked, in days serene
A-sudden clouds the balmy air of spring,
The air grows black, no ray is seen,
The wild winds howl, no bird doth sing,
The powdered dust to Heaven the tempests fling?

Within that sombre, boding cloud
God's chariot rolls in dread, majestic flight,
'Midst portents dire, in thunders loud,
Whilst vivid fires flash blazing light,
The planets quake, and nations bow in fright.

The angry floods in deluge fall
Filling the swollen river's turbid bed,
The peasant's soul the storms appall,
Destroy his harvest, ruin spread—
In one short moment is a year's work fled.

In Heaven's most exalted sphere
The movements of the starry host I'll know,
The signs and omens that appear
From planet houses, earthward flow,
And rule the fate of all the orbs below.

Who guides their course in nightly ways,
Who first applied the torch that lit their flame
With myriad, sparkling, gilded rays;
And why the Pleiads trembling came
Led to the Ocean's brink, in fear and shame:

The eternal source of life and light
That burns immortal, fed from its own spark;
Wherefore so slow the summer's flight,
The winter's night so drear and dark,
All shall I know, and well their causes mark.

My soul in Heaven shall raptured be
Amidst the Seraphs of the loftiest race;
Full of content, from troubles free,
In mansions pure, of golden grace,
Of happiest spirits most-blessed dwelling-place!

VIDA DESCANSADA.

Oh, what a blissful lot, from anguish free,
Is his, who, flying from the world's mad fray,
The hidden path descries
O'er which the few true wise
Trod in their placid wont from day to day!

Fell Envy's tooth ne'er rends the tranquil breast
For palaces, or courts where dwell the grand,
Nor for the lofty roof,
Nor for the gilded woof,
Nor jasper wrought by Moor of cunning hand.

No care has he that Fame with herald's voice
Shall sound his praises for a future race,
Nor simulation be his choice,
Nor in soft flatteries rejoice,
But in such false renown would find disgrace.

When signaled out by Glory's empty breath,
How shall it profit me, or bring content,
If to enjoy its breeze
I've sacrificed my ease,
And all my days in toil and trouble spent?

Oh, hills with verdure clad! oh, fount! oh, stream!
A haven safe from strife forever passed!
My bark from rock and shoal
Flies to thy sheltering goal,
A refuge from the fury of the blast.

A joyous day of sunlight, clear and pure,
A slumber sound, unbroken and serene,
Fain would I own; no frown
Should please, nor brow nor gown
By blood beflecked, by poverty made mean.

I would that birds, when first Aurora glows,
Should wake me with their untaught, cheery lays;
And not the grievous cares
That one forever wears
Who in another's service spends his days.

I fain would sip the sweets that Heaven has sent
And dwell alone, unruffled in repose,
In solitary glee,
From jealous loving free,
Remote from hope, from hatred, friends or foes.

An orchard have I planted with these hands
Upon a mountain's green and terraced slope,
And when soft spring is here
Ripe fruits and flowers appear,
A symbol true of love and faith and hope.

And like a miser would increase his store,
To see its rippling wavelets mighty grow,
From off yon angry height
A fountain, clear as light,
In headlong hurry hastes the river's flow.

With placid mien and pace, in deep content,
Amidst the groves its tortuous path it winds,
Draping its moorland way
With verdure fresh and gay,
In flowery garb its sedgey margin binds.

A thousand savors, wafted on the air
By gentle breezes, fan the orchard's store,
With tender echoing sigh
The zephyrs murmuring die,
Nor crown nor jewelled gauds can tempt me more.

Let those guard well their goodly treasured hoards
Whose faith doth lie in silver or in gold;
I would not hear their cry
When evil days draw nigh,
When winds and waves their fierce contentions hold;

When day is turned to night, with tattered sails
Buffets the storm their bark, by tempest tossed,
With fierce, ill-omened sounds
The welkin drear resounds,
The sea grows rich on wealth which they have lost.

To me an humble board and scanty fare
My kingdom are, far off from cares I sleep;
The wine-cup's golden band
Wrought by a master-hand,
Be his who dreadeth not the angered deep.

And while penurious thirst still burns to gain,
With tortured mind by myriad cares oppressed,
Consumed in greedy pains,
Insatiate Avarice-chains,
I lie 'neath woodland shades with soul at rest.

With ivy leaves my home is bowered o'er,
Crowned with unfading laurel's brightest bay,
With tender chord I sing,
And touch the tuneful string,
And chant to tranquil lute a peaceful lay.

THE

PROPHECY OF THE TAGUS.*

What time King Rodrick loved and joyed
With beauteous Cava, by the Tagus' side,
In solitude, uncloyed;
The river opened wide
Its marshy throat and fateful warning sighed.

Oh, hour ill-omened for thy soul,
Oh, wicked King! for now the sounds I hear
Of arms, that clash and roll,
While flame-girt Mars, with spear
Menaces fearful woe to all most dear.

Alas! thy glory'll change to shame,
Thy loves and kisses turn to lament sore!
And this most beauteous dame
That e'er the sun shone o'er
Must be a curse the Goths shall aye deplore!

* By Spanish critics this ode is considered as perfect in all its parts. The imagery is the same as that employed by Camoens at a later date; the River Tagus addresses King Roderic as the Spirit of the Cape does the Portuguese adventurers.

'Tis sacrilegious war and woes,
Fell desolation, murder, tears and brand,
Thy arms do now enclose,
And many a sorrow glows
For thee and all the vassals of thy land;

For those who till the fertile fields
Of Constantine, and those where Ebro's shore
Rich harvest yields
Of golden store;
And hapless Lusitania bathe in gore.

E'en now from Cadiz news of shame
Recalls the injured Count to vengeance dire;
He recks not future fame.
The Moorish hosts draw nigher,
They tarry not to wreak their burning ire.

List how the heavens re-echo loud
With Paynim shout, with trumpet clang and blare!
From Afric comes a crowd
Of Moors, bloodthirsty, proud,
Who wave Mahomet's standard to the air.

The cruel Arab wields his lance,
The welkin rings beneath their battle gage;
Full eager for Death's dance
The neighing chargers prance,
And countless squadrons glut their deadly rage.

The soil grows black beneath their tread;
The billowing main is wholly lost to sight
Beneath their canvass spread;
The dust above their head
Obscures the sun, and turns the day to night.

Alas, how soon they'll reach the shore
Those massive ships that hasten to their prey!
With many a stalwart rower
That bends above the oar,
The foaming deep sheds fire beneath their way.

Eolus wafts a favoring breeze
Abaft the beam to speed them on their road;
Across the narrow seas
Old Neptune grants them ease,
And with his trident stills his dread abode.

Alas! do Cava's deadly charms
Still hold thee captive-bound upon her lap?
Dost thou not hear th' alarms
That summon thee to arms?
Dost thou not see th' Herculean straits' mishap?

Arouse! Ope wide thine eyes! Bestir!
Quick cross the snowy mountain, seize the plain!
Spare not the bloody spur,
Give to thy steed full rein,
And throw with thundering hand thy spear insane!

Oh, what awaits thee of travail!
Alas, what sweat shall pour from off thy brow,
When clad in heavy mail
Thy foes shall fierce assail,
On foot, on horse—thy crown shall overthrow!

Oh, godlike Betis, flowing free
Bestained with Spanish and with strangers' blood,
Bear to the ravening sea
A mingled company
Of broken helms and nobles on thy flood!

And furious Mars, with rage accurst,
Scatters five firebrands, incites his trains,
For carnage deep-athirst;
The sixth, alas! ordains
My country dear to wear barbarian chains!

ODE TO AVARICE.

In vain they vex the ocean's flow,
Those ships of Portugal; nor Persian seas,
Nor kind Molucca's islands grow
That best of all the wondrous trees
That soothes the drooping, troubled mind to ease.

Ne'er think 'twill calm the cankered heart
My Philip, all the wealth that Indian ore
Or sparkling emeralds can impart;
The greedy eye, askance, seeks more
Than grasping soul can e'er increase its store.

It was a Captain once of Rome
Whose life was quenched, but not his thirst severe,
By Persian goblet's poisoned foam;
And Tantalus brooked ghastly fear
As oft the river to his lips drew near.

'Tis wretched thus to be athirst,
And, uncoerced, to labor, slave and tire;
Of evil fates 'tis sure the worst
To cross the waves, hunt gold in mire,
To clench the tightened, niggard hand still nigher.

Of what avail the gathered heap
Won by the villany of naked dice,
If at the last 't has murdered sleep,
Or wrinkled deep the sunken eyes,
To leave a rich man in a pauper's guise?

